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KCSC (Korean Community Service Center)
Annual Fundraising Banquet
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(As Prepared For Delivery)

In the 1950's, I was a little girl growing up in Pikesville, Maryland, in Baltimore County. My mom was of Irish descent, the granddaughter, we believe, of immigrants who fled Ireland during the Potato Famine of the 1840's.

My dad is German. His surname "Schuster" means "someone who repairs shoes" and his ancestors probably came from the Stuttgart area of Germany. I suspect that because Schuster is a common Swabian name and a man named Wolfgang Schuster serves as mayor of Stuttgart.

But I don't know any of that for sure because my family has never kept track of our roots. My ancestors left the places of their birth, came to America, and never looked back. And that is unfortunate.

Not so with the Korean American community who has settled here in Fairfax County. Ties to your mother country remain strong, something I think is important and that contributes to the great tradition of family that the Korean community is known for.

When I was growing up in Baltimore, I didn't know anyone who was of Asian descent. But across the state line in Virginia, which would later become my adopted home, Korean Americans were already beginning to establish themselves.

During the 50's – as hard as it is to believe – Fairfax County was known as the largest dairy producing community in Virginia.

Several years ago, when I researched the central part of Fairfax County as part of the "A Look Back at Braddock" history project I initiated, I learned that just 50 years ago we were a community of little farms and villages. Fairfax County's population (which is now almost 1.2 million) was only 98,557.

But according to the 1950 Census, about 31 Korean American immigrants were already calling Fairfax County home.

One of them was Dr. Chae Chung Choi. Dr. Choi was born in Kaesung, Korea. When he was about 20, he immigrated to the United States. He graduated from Emory University in Atlanta and the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond. He received a master's degree in public health from John Hopkins University. Dr. Choi eventually made his home in the Mt. Vernon and Fort Hunt areas of Fairfax County, where some of his family still lives.

I know this because Dr. Choi's history is one of the many stories included in the wonderful book that resulted from another History Project I sponsored – "The Fairfax County Asian American History Project" – A Contemporary History Honoring 143 Years of Asian Residents in Fairfax County (1867-2010).

Other stories that can be found in the book are those of:

Ilryong Moon, first elected member of the Fairfax County School Board.

Of **Yearn Hong Choi**, an accomplished poet and author who composed a moving poem for a first time ever Naturalization Ceremony (sponsored by the AAHP Task Force) at the Fairfax County Government Center in May, 2009.

And **JeungHwa Elmejjad-Yi**, Chairman of the KACC (Korean American Cultural Committee), who is the major force behind establishing a Korean Bell Garden in the Northern Virginia Regional Park, Meadowlark Gardens, in Vienna.

The Bell Garden, funded by the KACC in partnership with the Republic of Korea, will be a real landmark – the only such garden in the United States. I am certain that it will become a significant tourist attraction, but it is also a symbol of the rich partnership between Korea and America.

The groundbreaking for the garden took place on June 27th of this year, and also commemorated the 60th anniversary of the Korean War.

The list of Korean American individuals who have made their mark in Fairfax County also includes:

Harold Pyon, first Korean American member of the Fairfax County Park Authority, and also my appointed member to the Small Business Commission, and recently elected State Delegate Mark Keam. The book was written by Filipino American Cora Foley who challenged me to sponsor this Asian American History Project one day as she visited the grave of her father at Fairfax Memorial Park in Fairfax on the same day I was speaking at their 50th anniversary.

I am always struck by how something that may appear to be a minor or casual encounter can turn out to be pivotal.

Had I not agreed to work with Cora to sponsor this project, doors would not have opened to me that have resulted in many friendships, relationships, and partnerships - especially with the growing and thriving Korean American community in Fairfax County.

Work on the project (which has produced a Website as well as the book) coincided with my campaign for Chairman of the Board of Supervisors. Throughout this time, I enjoyed the warm encouragement and support of members of the Asian American History Project Task Force who were helping to gather historic information, conduct oral interviews and take (or digitize) photos for the book and website.

In July of 2009, Fairfax County formed a Sister City Partnership with Songpa-gu, a district of Seoul, Korea. The Songpa-gu government reached out to Fairfax County to become their Sister after researching jurisdictions throughout the County and deciding that they wanted us - we had many similarities – we have both experienced rapid growth during the past 20 years, we are both affluent and interested in environmental protection.

I had the opportunity to visit our new Sister in September of 2009 and was very impressed with Songpa-gu. It is the part of Seoul where the 1988 Olympics were held. After the Olympics, a city with soaring buildings, laced with welcoming parks and public art developed around the infrastructure. I couldn't help thinking about our efforts to redevelop Tysons Corner and how some of these development patterns could be replicated.

Our two jurisdictions have since established a Teacher Exchange with several Fairfax County teachers spending time this past August in Korea. In December, we will host teachers from Korea in our Fairfax County schools.

I will finish up by saying that earlier this month I had the honor of attending the Opening of the new Korean Central Presbyterian Church in Centreville. It is a remarkable facility. Not just because it is beautiful and very spacious, but because it demonstrates how our Korean community in Fairfax County has successfully established itself as an integral part of the fabric of the place we call home.

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